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Southeast Colorado River Basin

Water Related Recreation

15.1 INTRODUCTION

This section of the Southeast Colorado River Basin Plan discusses the major aspects of recreational opportunities and related land use. These include the use of state and federal parks, commercial recreation and a number of issues relating to both water and nonwater-related outdoor recreation.

15.2 SETTING

The area within Grand and San Juan counties supports a number of major water-related recreational sites. The Colorado and San Juan rivers, many lakes and reservoirs, and several rivers and streams provide exceptional boating, sightseeing, rafting and miscellaneous water sport opportunities.

Although the area is isolated and to some, desolate, water-related recreation is big business and a major element of the local economy. There are three state parks. Two of these, Dead Horse Point and Goosenecks of the San Juan State Park, provide world-class views of the Colorado River and San Juan River, respectively, from nearly 2,000 feet above. Combined, the two parks draw an estimated 250,000 guests each year, the majority out-of-state and foreign visitors. The Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum draws visitors to enjoy an unequalled collection of Anasazi pottery and other ancient Indian artifacts. The remains of an Ancestral Pueblo Indian Village is part of the museum.

The Colorado and San Juan rivers are the major water recreation corridors through the basin. Minor, but very important hiking and

touring stream corridors include Indian, Westwater, Grand Gulch, Cottonwood and Recapture creeks. The high plateaus are punctuated by the Abajo Mountains west of Monticello and the La Sal Mountains east of Moab which are part of the Manti-La Sal National Forest. Old trails and mining roads

criss-cross the area; many providing access to remote canyons through nearby rivers and small streams. The area is very popular for hiking, mountain biking, trail riding with off-road vehicles, horse-back riding, rafting, canoeing, kayaking, personal water craft boating and power boating. Colorado River trips are a popular activity as shown in Table 15-1.

In addition, the basin is further enhanced by significant populations of big game, waterfowl and fish species indigenous to the area. More detailed information regarding wildlife and fisheries is given in Section 14.

White water rafting down the Colorado River, exploring the parched Monument Valley, biking along the slickrock canyons and hiking through the lush, green forests of the La Sal and Abajo mountains; this is a mecca for the tourist and recreationalist.

There are also a number of historic and general sightseeing trails that enhance the recreational experience at existing reservoirs and rivers. New recreational trails are being established along the Colorado River upstream from Moab and along Mill Creek in Moab.



Rafting on the Colorado River

15.3 ORGANIZATIONS AND REGULATIONS

Good management of the recreational facilities often determines their popularity and provides an enjoyable experience for the users. The responsibility for these facilities is at the local, state and federal levels.

15.3.1 Local

About 18 percent of the basin is in the Navajo Indian Reservation. Grand and San Juan

counties are located in the Southeastern Association of Governments Multi-County Planning District. Most larger communities provide infrastructure and services such as parks and playgrounds, swimming pools, golf courses, hotels, motels, restaurants, equipment leasing and tour guide services for local use as well as for the tourism/ recreation industry.

15.3.2 State

The Division of Parks and Recreation is the “recreation authority” under state statute, with a mission to “...enhance the quality of life in Utah through parks, people and programs.” The division enforces the state boating laws, off-highway vehicle laws and state park regulations, including the Antiquities Act.

The division also administers several federal programs associated with the development and operation of recreational facilities. These programs include the Land and Water Conservation Fund and matching grant program, the River Enhancement Program, and the Non-Motorized Trail Grant Program. They also manage the state parks.

15.3.3 Federal

The federal government is the largest administrator of recreational facilities in the

Table 15-1 COLORADO RIVER TRIPS		
1996	Commercial	Private
Trips	2,075	3,500
Passengers	34,546	29,000
Passenger Days	37,429	33,350
1997	Commercial	Private
Trips	1,460	3,300
Passengers	35,926	27,025
Passenger Days	38,542	23,500

basin. The Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Forest Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs operate a number of local water-related recreational facilities that include boating marinas at Halls Crossing and Hite and a number of river rafting sites providing access to the Colorado River at Cisco, Dewey's Bridge, Hallet Ranch, Moab and Westwater.

Federal funding through the Utah Trail Grants Program provides for the development of "non-motorized trails". The popularity of mountain biking is growing with a number of trails being developed throughout Grand and San Juan counties. A summary of non-motorized trails along with funding expenditures associated with each trail is given in Table 15-2.

15.4 OUTDOOR RECREATION FACILITIES AND USE

Although most of the day-to-day use of recreational facilities is by seasonal tourists, local parks are heavily used by local community and

church groups and private residents. Water-related facilities are also popular.

15.4.1 Local Recreation Facilities

Most of the local popular recreation facilities and sites are located in the population centers of Blanding, Bluff, Moab, Monticello and Montezuma Creek. The most frequented facilities include the municipal golf courses in Moab and Monticello, the Navajo Visitors Center and Goulding Trading Post. Information and visitor centers are located in Moab, Glen Canyon National Recreational Area and Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum.

The communities of Blanding, Moab and Monticello have a number of parks and recreational sites. The Matheson Wetlands Reserve near Moab provides fish and wildlife habitat in addition to being a scenic attraction.

Moab has the largest number of recreational facilities including a municipal golf course, local parkway corridor, various walking trails and a

Table 15-2 NON-MOTORIZED TRAILS MATCHING FISCAL ASSISTANCE AWARDS, 1991-1996		
County	Project Description	Grant
Grand County	Moab City Millcreek Parkway Trail	\$ 95,000
	Grand County Moab Mountain Bike Patrol	10,000
	Arches NP Delicate Arch Trail	9,000
	Moab BLM Colorado River Trailheads	7,000
	BLM Slickrock Bike Trailhead	57,000
	Miner's Basin Trailhead, USFS	20,000
	Kokopelli's Trail & Dewey Bridge	25,000
	BLM Poison Spider Mesa Trailhead	35,400
	BLM Fisher Towers Trailhead	12,500
San Juan County	Monticello BLM-Butler Wash/Interpretive	2,900
All F.S. Ranger Districts	Trail Construction Tractor	19,500
Total		\$293,300

town park. Moab has also developed a large tourist trade based on seasonal river rafting on the Colorado River and off-road vehicle drives and rallies. The Division of Parks and Recreation contributed \$41,000 to Lions Park improvements in Moab in 1997.

The city of Monticello provides a number of recreational facilities including public and private golf courses and a number of small parks. Other small commercial businesses cater to seasonal tourist traffic providing Indian craft and jewelry shops, natural history museums and restaurants.



Moab water park

Blanding has a park/picnic area, public swimming pool and displays of Anazasi Indian remains. There are also nearby reservoirs for fishing.

Most of the local communities utilize hundreds of miles of mining roads for biking and walking trails. Sightseeing tours along old mining roads are staged out of Blanding, Bluff and Moab. In

all, there are over 16 major trails and trailhead facilities recently improved through the assistance of state recreational programs.

A number of privately owned businesses cater to tourism and recreational activities in addition to the state and federal recreation sites. The most popular of these include white water rafting, jeep (four wheel drive) tours and jet boating.

15.4.2 State Parks

To take advantage of the many scenic opportunities in the basin, the Division of Parks and Recreation manages the Dead Horse Point and Goosenecks of the San Juan state parks and Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum. These parks are unique and offer tourists scenic views of river canyons in addition to cultural and historic information about the basin. A summary of tourist and general site information for each park is given in Table 15-3.

Rangers are assigned full time at Dead Horse Point and Edge of the Cedars state parks. Winter snowmobiling patrols are also provided at some popular winter recreational sites.

Dead Horse Point State Park - Dead Horse Point State Park is one of Utah's most spectacular state parks. Towering nearly 2,000 feet above the Colorado River, the park provides a breathtaking panorama of sculptured pinnacles and buttes found only in Canyonlands Country.

Table 15-3 STATE PARKS VISITATION			
State Park	1996 Visitation	Related Water Area	Camp Units
Dead Horse Point	202,452	River overlook	21
Goosenecks of the San Juan	45,356	River overlook	4 (primitive)
Edge of the Cedars Museum	29,948	Recapture Res 160 acres	Day use

Dead Horse State Park is on State Route 313, 18 miles off U.S. Highway 191, 8 miles north of Moab. The park has a visitor center, interpretive museum, modern rest rooms, a twenty-one unit campground, sewage disposal station, group camping area, pavilion and large overlook shelter. Although the campground is a full service facility, water is limited since it is hauled into the park. Visitors are encouraged to fill their recreation vehicles before entering the park.

Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum - Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum in Blanding is the site of a pre-Columbian Pueblo Indian ruin and a modern museum, which is the regional archaeological repository. Remains of the Ancestral Pueblo Indian Village with its unique architectural structures is a testament to the Indian civilization that once flourished in southeastern Utah. Edge of the Cedars Museum houses an excellent collection of Anasazi pottery and other exceptional ancient Indian artifacts. Additional exhibits display cultural materials and information about Navajo and Ute Indians. A picnic area is available; however, the park does not have camping facilities.

Goosenecks of the San Juan State Park - Four miles off State Highway 163 near Mexican Hat, Goosenecks of the San Juan State Park offers a scenic view of a 2,000-foot deep chasm carved through the Pennsylvania formation by the silt-laden San Juan River. The river flows for more



Goosenecks of the San Juan

than five miles while progressing only one linear mile toward Lake Powell. A paved access road is provided to the park site with primitive camping and vaulted rest rooms.

15.4.3 Federal Recreation Facilities

The Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service and National Park Service operate and maintain a number of recreational facilities in the basin. These include the Dark Canyon Wilderness Area; Manti-La Sal National Forest; Glen Canyon National Recreation Area; Hovenweep, Natural Bridges and Rainbow Bridge National Monuments; and Canyonlands and Arches National Parks. A summary of federally administered recreational sites is given in Table 15-4. Recreation services are also provided on Navajo Nation lands. Typical activities include local scenic tours, rafting, camping and retail sales of native products or crafts.

Commercial river running is a large portion of the area's overall annual tourist business. Over 380 white-water rafting tours were booked in 1996 involving over 4,400 rafters through Canyonlands National Park. Additional rafting tours are made on the San Juan River. In general, the rafting industry is policed and administrated by the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service and the Utah Division of Parks and Recreation. Most of the river-rafting outfitters are located in Moab. Table 15-5 provides additional information regarding a number of other private recreational activities.

15.5 RECREATION ACTIVITY PROBLEMS AND NEEDS

Most of the recreational activities in the basin are centered around water sports, natural scenic attractions and ancient Indian archeological sites. Problems associated with these local recreation activities are water safety, the preservation and use of local wilderness areas, and natural scenic features.

Table 15-4 MAJOR FEDERAL RECREATION AREAS				
Area	Name of Site	Camping	Day Use	Boating
Manti-La Sal NF	Dalton Spring	Yes (10)	Yes	–
	Devil Canyon	Yes (30)		
	Buckboard	Yes (13)		
	Warner	Yes (20)		Lake rafting
	Lake Oowah	Primitive		
	Pack Creek	Primitive	Yes	–
Canyonlands NP	Squaw Flat	Yes (31)	Yes	–
	Upheaval Dome		Yes	–
Hovenweep	Square Tower Ruins	Yes (31)	Yes	–
Natural Bridges	Natural Bridge NM	Yes (14)	Yes	–
Arches	Devils Garden	Yes (53)	Yes	
Rainbow	Rainbow Bridge NM	None		Boat marina
BLM	Wind Whistle Campground Needles Overlook Anticline Overlook			
	Sand Island ^a	Yes (15)	Yes (5)	Raft launching
	Green River Overlook	None	Yes	
	Hatch Point	Yes (10)		
^a Water will be piped in by 2000.				

Table 15-5 VISITOR USE REPORTED BY PRIVATE CONCESSIONAIRES, 1996	
Concession Recreational Service	Number of Customers:
Combination Jetboat and Jeep Tour	3,565
Canoe Rental-Pickup	2,189
Shuttle Services	508
Jetboat Scenic tour	558
River Rafting ^a	4,400
Totals	11,220
^a Source: Bureau of Land Management for Colorado River only.	

15.5.1 Water Safety

A primary concern to boating enthusiasts and local safety patrol officers is the growing number of personal water craft (PWC). These small, but powerful, motor boats are beginning to show up in growing numbers creating congested and dangerous situations within major reservoirs and at some isolated river locations. PWCs now represent over 20 percent of all boating activity within the state. A recent study has shown that over 115 boating accidents with an average of five fatalities occur each year within state reservoirs, a significant number related to PWCs.

15.5.2 Protection and Preservation of Cultural Areas

There is considerable concern regarding the protection and preservation of the area's outstanding cultural resources. The destruction of ancient Indian burial sites, transportation and sale of illegally secured artifacts, and other problems associated with archeological resources are occurring at an alarming rate.

15.5.3 Scenic and Wilderness Problems

The basin includes two national parks, three national monuments, a national recreational area, one national forest, one wilderness area, and three state parks. Although the Dark Canyon Wilderness Area is the only designated wilderness area, others are being studied. The designated wilderness study areas as of April 1999 are listed in Table 16-1. The area offers some of the most scenic recreation and wilderness sites in the United States. An effort is being made by national wilderness advocates to limit motorized access to a number of these areas. A recent land trade in Arches National Park has expanded the park's boundaries in an effort to protect outstanding resources.

15.5.4 Economic Values of Recreation and Leisure

Current studies are underway to analyze and measure recreational values. The area is rapidly

becoming a prime recreation destination site as evidenced by the rapid growth of local recreational based businesses. A recent study by the Division of Parks and Recreation has determined that every dollar spent by tourists and recreationists, generates approximately \$2.50 to \$3.00 within the community's economy. However, with the rapid growth in tourism, the impact on private, state and federal parks and recreational areas and other local resources needs to be assessed.

15.5.5 Recreational Activity Conflicts in the Slick Rock Area

The use of remote trails by motorized and non-motorized bikes has generated a number of conflicts throughout the basin. The use of common trails for both types of recreation bikes has resulted in a number of injuries and deaths and has raised concerns regarding the management of these areas by local and state recreation agencies.

Trails were originally established within the "slick rock" area by motorcyclists in the 1970s and 1980s. In recent years, non-motorized mountain bike activity has grown at a considerable rate creating an overcrowded condition on these trails.



Slick rock 4-wheeling

15.6 ALTERNATIVES

To address the issue of water safety, the Division of Parks and Recreation is stepping up their efforts to provide boating safety classes in the area. Topics discussed during these classes

typically include state regulations and laws relating to the use and management of boating craft throughout the state.

To preserve and protect the cultural resources, the state Legislature increased fines and penalties for the destruction of ancient Indian archeological sites through the existing state antiquity laws. Other suggestions or actions have included more programs by local museums and schools to educate the general public regarding the sanctity and importance of this heritage resource. The Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum has expanded its storage and laboratory areas to help preserve this resource. More needs to be done to follow through on enforcing and increasing these activities.

The solution to overcrowding on bike trails seems to be a public education program aimed at promoting "trail etiquette" among both types of bike enthusiasts. Signing and resource programming should also be considered through a joint effort between the Division of Parks and Recreation, other state and federal agencies, and local agencies dealing with the operation and maintenance of public recreational facilities. Programs that are currently available through the division include "know before you go," and "leave no trace" programs. These programs promote certification of youth bikers with the goal of promoting an understanding of environmental impacts created by all types of outdoor recreation, personal etiquette, safe use of equipment, respect for private property and enjoyment of the sport. □